



Foreign &
Commonwealth
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Lord Carlile of Berriew CRE QC
House of Lords
London
SW1A 0PW

Thank you for your letter of 24 December to the Foreign Secretary representing the concerns of the British Parliamentary Committee on Iran Freedom. I am responding as Minister for the Middle East and North Africa.

Human Rights

I share your concern about Iran's dire human rights record. Although President Rouhani has pledged his support for greater social equality and justice for all Iranians, there has, as yet, been little change in practice and much more needs to be done to ensure all Iranians enjoy the rights and freedoms they are entitled to. There were some limited positive steps at the end of 2013, such as the release of a number of political prisoners. However, there has also been a marked increase in the number of executions over the past year. Iran continues to have the highest rate of executions per capita in the world according to UN figures and the second highest number of journalists in prison in the world. Dissent is not widely tolerated, and the majority of newspapers, TV and radio in Iran are government controlled. Access to the internet and social media is heavily restricted. Cyber activists, internet experts, bloggers and activists are routinely arrested and detained. Women continue to suffer discrimination, and there is continued persecution of religious and ethnic minorities.

The UK remains at the forefront of international efforts to encourage the Iranian government to take steps to improve its human rights record. We have continued to raise individual cases with the Iranian government, and address trends such as the increase in executions and the persecution of religious minorities. In October, the UK contributed to the Universal Periodic Review of Iran's human rights record at the Human Rights Council in Geneva. The UK raised concerns about the increased use of the death penalty, and restrictions on freedom of religion and belief, freedom of

expression, due process and women's issues. The UK also tabled two recommendations which would make an important contribution to improving Iran's approach to human rights: an immediate moratorium on the execution of juveniles and those who committed crimes not recognised as "most serious"; and allowing detainees access to a lawyer at all stages of pre-trial detention. Iran is expected to respond to these recommendations before the Human Rights Council in March 2015.

On 18 December, for the eleventh consecutive year, a resolution was passed at the UN in support of human rights in Iran. The resolution was passed with 83 countries voting in support and 35 countries voting against. The UK co-sponsored this resolution, and lobbied extensively for support. The UK also lobbied successfully for the renewal of the mandate of the UN Special Rapporteur for Human Rights in Iran, Dr Ahmed Shaheed, at the Human Rights Council in March.

Nuclear Programme

A comprehensive nuclear deal with Iran is in all our interests. It is the best way of ensuring Iran does not develop a nuclear weapons capability. We still believe a deal is possible, although significant gaps remain between our positions. On that basis, the E3+3 and Iran agreed on 24 November to continue negotiations and extend the interim deal until the end of June. We will aim to have a political framework for a final deal in four months, with a further three months to work out the technical detail. Importantly, while negotiations continue, the most concerning aspects of Iran's nuclear programme will remain frozen, and in some cases they have been rolled back. The bulk of sanctions will remain in place - however, we do not believe that further sanctions pressure would be appropriate at the present time.

Camp Liberty

We continue to monitor the situation at Camp Liberty through our Embassy in Baghdad, working with the UN Assistance Mission in Iraq (UNAMI). We support the UN call for more to be done to protect residents, and we raise issues with the Government of Iraq, whose responsibility it is to ensure the safety of the residents.

Regarding the MeK more broadly, the UK has concerns over the organisation's history of violence and maintains a policy of no official or ministerial contact with them. It should be for the Iranian people to choose their own government. However, we see little evidence of popular support for the MeK in Iran.

ISIL

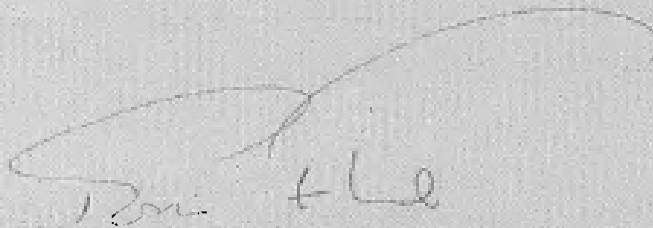
We all – including Iran – face challenges from extremist forces across the Middle East, including ISIL. We have urged Iran to choose this moment to show it can be part of the solution, not part of the problem, and engage constructively with the international community in the face of shared threats. We welcome the support the

Iranian Government has given to the new Government of Iraq, and its efforts to promote more inclusive governance for all Iraqis. A similar approach is needed in Syria, to promote a transition to a new Government capable of representing all Syrians.

Nevertheless, there continue to be many areas of Iranian foreign policy where we sharply disagree, particularly Iran's ongoing support for the Assad regime and their ongoing support to militant groups in the region. We will continue to use our increasing bilateral engagement with Iran to discuss these differences as well as areas where our interests coincide.

Edward Oakden, Director for the Middle East, would be glad to meet with you to discuss these matters further. Please contact [REDACTED] Edward's Personal Assistant on [REDACTED] or [REDACTED] to arrange a time of mutual convenience.

Yours sincerely,



TOBIAS ELLWOOD MP
Parliamentary Under Secretary of State